

IF THE TUNE FITS.....WEAR IT!

The very first step a choreographer should take is not a dance step. The first step is to consult with the director, finding out what she wants to do with the song and finding a characterization and approach to the music. Before a move is created, the choreographer and director should identify the overall attitude of the song and the type of character or the identity of the character who would be singing this song. It is only when the performers know who they are can they effectively express this song and become one with it. This is the essential first step so that the movement - characterized and expressive gestures - can be the core around which the gross movement is developed. In this way the movement and the music will work together.

The director should then point out to the choreographer the important musical segments of the song, i.e., key changes and passages where the chorus will have trouble, the dynamic plan or phrasing where the movement will need to help the chorus sing, tempo traps where the movement will either enhance or potentially interfere with the music...etc. By knowing these things ahead of time, valuable time can be saved and movement can be created to make the showmanship, both movement and expression work for the song.

After this basic work is done, then the choreographer and her team has a direction and focus for the creation of the visual performance.

THE CHOREOGRAPHY TEAM

Why a team? If just the choreographer creates the movement the choreography will represent only her style and taste in every song. Even if this is great style and taste, it can become one dimensional. A team keeps fresh ideas rolling in, prevents burnout and trains new people. It also encourages the whole idea of team effort - besides, it's fun!

The team should be about 5-7 members. These members need not be dancers, but people who have acting talent or "expressives" whose gestures and movements are always emotional and bigger than life.

The choreographer as leader of the choreography team is a facilitator as well as a creator. She must allow other ideas to come up and prevent any power issues from happening in this creative process - even her own. She must be flexible, openminded enough to accept new ideas while being creative enough to build on them and decisive enough so that the team will not spend all day on one section....And leap tall buildings in a single bound.

BEHIND CLOSED DOORS - BRAINSTORMING

Now the fun part! You have the character and you know her intention - why she is singing the song. So talk the words of the song as the character would and gesture and move the way she would. You will find the basis for your movement here. Throw all ideas on the table - even if they are totally ridiculous (and sometimes they are!) because you may inspire someone else. Sometimes a turn of the head, posture or arm movement can turn someone's creative juice to the right move. If there are several ideas for one area of a song, remember them all in case the one you like best doesn't work.

GENERAL HINTS: Identify the body English of the character chosen to sing this song and decide on her feeling. How would she physically express this song?

Do not use large trunk movements for quick tempo. Moving the whole body takes more time than can be used when driving an uptune and generally slows tempo.

For louds - spread chorus face on and forward

For softs -face body away, close in together

Chorus size affects movement. A small chorus cannot risk its sound by dancing people all over the place. Wave moves are not as effective on a smaller chorus. Work within the parameters of your ability to sing and move.

Check yourself with a chorus tape. Tempo might not be what you remember it to be or pick-ups and swipes might exist where you didn't remember them!

Keep going back to the character, who she is, what she feels and what she wants.

After this brainstorming session one member of the team can make up choreography sheets or videotape for the team so they can learn it together in order to present it to the director.

THE UNVEILING (GULP)

Showing the choreography to the director is one of the most nerve-wracking times in a choreographer's life! A lot of time has been spent thinking and working to make a full visual plan. Be prepared that she will not like it 100% - or at all. You **must** be flexible.

No move is worth bad feelings. If your director really doesn't like a move or moves you've presented then ditch it or try modifying it. Something better will come along - maybe one of those "other" moves you had thought up in the brainstorming session will work. Some

moves that you think are great will not look great on a chorus or on that particular song. A move you think is terrible may look fine. You may be surprised. I know I have. Keep an open mind. You all have the same goal in mind - a good visual product which doesn't impair the sound. This is not your child although you and your team did give birth to it!! Your director needs to feel comfortable with the visual plan and not feel as if she's in a power struggle. She knows what she's looking for - even if she can't describe it or put it into words. She'll know when it's right.

Choreography is only a part of the Showmanship Category. That category also includes costume, make-up, pitchpipe technique, exit/break/exit, poise, command, energy, vocal skills and the performance itself, the visual expression of the music. When ego gets out of hand remember that three judges have their heads down.

One final point here. Choreography is quite subjective, but you either sing in tune or you don't. Don't argue/fight with your director. Remember that the buck stops with her.

TEACHING

Tell the chorus about the character and her intention when singing the song. Get your chorus to approach the introduction of the choreography as if they were trying on a dress. You need to see how it "fits" first and then adjust. Your chorus needs to be flexible enough to understand that a move may not "fit" them quite right and need to be altered or eliminated or replaced.

Make sure the team is prepared enough to give the chorus a good idea of the unit look and effect. Each member can have her own little nuance but must be careful that it doesn't break the unit and take away from the visual interpretation. Make sure the team is prepared to "sell" the choreography to the chorus.

When introducing the choreography detail is not the priority. Gross body movement and facial expression are. Have them get the drift of the character and her basic body movement. Have them get into her body. Every song is not a smile and your veteran Sweet Adeline will have a hard time understanding that. A lifted countenance is necessary when singing and you don't need to smile to do it. An appropriate facial expression is the aim of the choreographer. The facial expression should enhance and express the attitude of the song and movement (i.e. a sexy look is not a big, toothy grin!) Explain each facial expression as part of your teaching. Show by example. Make it fun - over exaggerate. Show the wrong way as well as the correct way and make them exaggerate the wrong way, so they can feel the difference. Most facial expressions need to be bigger than life to be seen from the stage.

Also teach that all movement is **directed or led from the rib cage**. In order for good solid vocal production to exist the rib cage must be up and open. Choreography can be a great help in reminding the singer of good posture as well as words, melody, and dynamics. Good choreography helps the singer to sing well and physically express the feelings of the song as if she were speaking them herself.

When teaching **COMPLIMENT PEOPLE**. Call out names!!! Find something to praise - especially in those who are not so proficient. Nothing succeeds like success. After a while they can handle correction because they trust you to compliment them as well.

Another important consideration when in front of the chorus is for the director and the choreographer and her team to be a unit. The director has already pre-approved this plan with reservation as to how it looks on the chorus and how it sings. As the choreography and singing evolve over the next weeks, the "fit" will be tailored by the director and choreographer. It is important that the discussions be constructive. No arguing or fighting or face-making if unhappy. The director has the final say, especially in front of the chorus, but both should try to work to find a compromise they can both live with outside of the rehearsal. Dissension weakens the unit and leadership. Don't be a part of doing that to your chorus.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Choreography should **FEEL RIGHT**, be **EASY TO TEACH**, and be **LEARNED QUICKLY**. This is their hobby and they are not dancers - remember that. Just keep positive, keep drilling and understand that no one is trying to make mistakes, they are all trying the best they can.